

CABLE, FRENCH ATLANTIC

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Summer exhibit features trans-Atlantic cable

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DUXBURY — Harold Mansfield, an 85-year-old Plymouthean, is an important contributor to an exhibit on the French Cable, which will be shown to the public this summer at the historical King Caesar House in Duxbury.

Mansfield donated two items of interest, an oak bench and a piece of the original cable, which were a part of the cable-telegraph equipment used in establishing the first means of direct contact with continental Europe in 1869.

The exhibit, sponsored by the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society, will tell how cable experts aboard the ship *Great Eastern* laid the telegraph cable from Brest, France, to Abrams Hill in Duxbury.

Mansfield, a collector of historical items of various values, has always talked about the French Cable to anyone who will listen. On learning that Robert Enemark and Richmond Wight of Duxbury were to set up the exhibit at the King Caesar house, he offered the original oak bench from which messages were telegraphed to Brest on Friday, July 23, 1869.

Ladd MacMillan of Duxbury, retired official of the Heritage Plantation in Sandwich, and chairman of exhibits for the Duxbury historical society, said the exhibit will also include a number of items loaned by the French Cable Museum in Orleans.

The trip

The Nov. 6, 1869, edition of the *Scientific American*, noted that the *Great Eastern* left Portland for Brest, after taking in a supply of coal. On board were 450 people, including members of the electrical and engineering staff, the cable hands and the crew.

The route for the cable was from Brest, France, under the Atlantic to the southern edge of the Grand Bank; then to the French island of St. Pierre off the south coast of Newfoundland, and then down past Cape Breton Island and Nova Scotia to Duxbury.

Franklin K. Hoyt in his booklet, "The French Atlantic Cable," stated that the *Eastern* was secured for the voyage because no other ship in the world was large enough to take the entire cable on board. It took eight months to prepare, but on June 21, 1869, *The Eastern*, accompanied by three other consort ships, set forth from Brest for St. Pierre.

Welcome

When two of the consorts, *The Chiltern* and the *Scanderia*, came to anchor about a half mile off Duxbury Beach on July 23, 1869, opposite a small knoll at the edge of the beach known as Rouse's Hummock, the ships were soon surrounded by smaller craft of every description. A delegation of Duxbury merchants went aboard to pay their respects, congratulating the officers and crew for bringing the cable safely across the Atlantic.

As the boats carrying the cable grated on the beach, artillery salutes were fired from the *Chiltern* and *Scanderia* and the thousand or more people who had gathered on the beach to watch the joining of this final link between Europe and America burst into cheers. Tests proved the cable was in perfect conditions and signals were at once sent to Brest.

Hoyt said one of the first messages to be sent to Europe was to Emperor Napoleon II, announcing the successful completion of the enterprise, the first direct line of submarine communications between Continental Europe and the United States, a distance of more than 3,000 miles.

Invited to celebrate the landing of the cable at a banquet held in Duxbury the following week were Mayor N.B. Shurtleff of Boston, and many other prominent political figures, in addition to several officials of the French Cable Co.